

CABINET STATEMENT

CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION (NORTH) – COUNCILLOR BICKNELL

The Housing Team have been busy over the last few months assisting homeless people and other vulnerable groups across the Borough. Below is a summary of the activities the Team have been engaged in:

Housing and Homelessness

- A multi-agency taskforce was launched to tackle a recent rough sleeper increase in Eastleigh Town Centre; this approach saw a speedy reduction in numbers resulting in positive outcomes.
- The number of households in emergency Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation continues to be higher than previous months due to the Protect and Vaccinate Initiative launched in December 2021. The guideline continues to be for any individuals found to be rough sleeping to be offered emergency accommodation. We continue to work closely with partners to identify rough sleepers at the earliest opportunity, to engage with them when rough sleeping or in accommodation and to explore longer term housing options.
- The Household Support Fund is being administered by the Housing Team to support our most vulnerable residents with housing related costs. We have already supported many families and individuals to prevent eviction from their homes with support from the fund and continue to explore opportunities to help and support residents during particularly challenging times.

Disabled Facilities Grants and Housing Enforcement

- The Housing Enforcement team have seen a 26% increase in service requests on pre-pandemic levels which reflects the greater awareness around home environment and confidence for residents to ask for help.
- The Disabled Facility Grants team have approved 38 referrals for adaptations, a number of these are complex and lifechanging adaptations which will significantly improve the wellbeing and independence of our most vulnerable residents.

Housing benefits and Council Tax Support

- Housing Benefits Subsidy for year 20/21 was signed off by Department for Work and Pensions without issue/errors (in excess of £19m).
- Performance for the service in terms of processing days has significantly improved as a result of a full service review allowing the Council to engage quicker with some of our most vulnerable residents at a time when Covid has brought so much uncertainty.

As well as helping residents with housing and council tax support the Council has recognised the rising cost of living crisis that is already affecting many people across the Borough. Perhaps the biggest impact hitting many households is the new cap on

energy prices that has been announced. Add in the Governments imposed National Insurance increase of 1.25% from April 2022 and people are really struggling. So, to assist as much as possible over the next two months, Eastleigh Borough Council will be partnering with Citizens Advice Eastleigh to provide residents with advice and support to help tackle these rising costs. Each week we will be releasing links to useful information on rising energy bills and inflation and sign posting people to where they can receive additional support to help them with debt. And of course, the Council is helping another way by keeping its portion of Council Tax 1% below inflation so as not to add further to the financial pressures of our residents.

Regeneration North

On the Regeneration side of things, I'm pleased to announce that The Lawn Road play area is now open for local children to enjoy. As well as Covid and Brexit related delays this project was plagued by repeated vandalism which not only resulted in extended severe delays but an increase in the cost to taxpayers too. It is therefore great, and a relief, to finally see it open being well used and enjoyed by the local children. I also have it on good authority that the new slide has been very well received by the users something that I'm informed Councillor Bourne can testify to having also tried it out.

Finally, I'm pleased to announce that the complete refurbishment of the bus station toilets will commence in late March. The new toilets will provide the Town with new spacious, clean accessible toilets with improved provision for parents with small children and prams, enhanced disabled toilet facilities which will also include an enhanced Changing Places toilet access. Further details will be released by the Communications department in the coming weeks.